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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

TEN YEARS NEAR THE GERMAN FRONTIER. By Maurice Francis Egan, former United States Minister to Denmark. New York: George H. Doran Company.

Did the war begin in the Balkans, in the brain of the Kaiser, in the policy of Frederick, called the Great, or in the murder of Abel? It is always permissible for a writer to choose his own point of departure. Mr. Egan says that the war began in Denmark; and there is much to be urged in favor of this view. In 1864, Denmark was deprived of Slesvig-Holstein—a province as Danish as Alsace-Lorraine is French—by the united pressure of Prussia and of Austria, Prussia's subservient ally. "This was the beginning," says Mr. Egan, "of the mighty German Empire; it made the Kiel Canal possible, and laid the foundation of the German navy. Slesvig, too, supplied the best sailors in the world. Bismarck, when he cynically treated Slesvig as a pawn in his game, had his eye on a future navy—a navy which would one day force the British from the dominion of the sea!"

Certainly, wherever one looks for the beginning of the war, one finds (if one keeps within the modern period) that it began in German perfidy, German treachery, exercised toward some weaker neighbor. The fate of Belgium roused American conscience; it made Americans set their teeth in grim determination; the fate of Serbia made American blood boil. But nothing could have exacerbated American sensibilities or outraged the American spirit of self-assertion more than to have been placed—if that had been possible—in the situation of Denmark. America in constant fear of a powerful, unscrupulous "Southern neighbor," America forced to consider what that neighbor might think of every ordinary exercise of American sovereignty—unthinkable! Yet such was the situation of Denmark—and the Danes did not like it much better than we would have liked it if we had been in their place.

To a diplomat during the war, and before it, Copenhagen afforded a most advantageous post of observation not only because it was a favorable position for watching German dealings with Norway and Sweden as well as with Denmark, not only because it enabled Mr. Egan to obtain a somewhat intimate view of Germany through Danish eyes, but also because Copenhagen was a sort of diplomatic clearing house. One important truth of world-politics was impressed on Mr. Egan soon after he first went to Denmark as United States Minister in 1907. Laugh as one might, and as most people did in that year, at

German bumptiousness and at German encroachments,—the alarm had already been sounded in South America,—it became plain to Mr. Egan that Prussianized Germany might at any moment seize Denmark, and that in this case the Danish West Indies would become Prussian—a pleasant prospect for us, in view of our Monroe Doctrine! Thus, an interest in the West Indian problem, unusual among Americans at that time, and an opportunity to feel out Danish opinion in this matter and to catch the Danish reaction toward Germany, gave our Minister, not the gift of prophecy, but a certain insight into German motives and methods, from the first. But this was not all: to be a diplomat at Copenhagen required an unusual attention to the mysteries of dynastic politics—the bad old system of personal relationships between rulers that had not, during Mr. Egan's stay in Denmark, by any means lost its power. That Mr. Egan possessed the requisite knowledge is made apparent not only by the ease—dazzling to republican simplicity—with which he treats of royal and semi-royal family histories, but also by the many graphic thumbnail sketches he gives of important and interesting personages. Although King Frederick objected to having the Court at Copenhagen regarded as a sort of royal marriage market, and discouraged suitors for the hands of his daughters, it was none the less true that previous royal marriages and the fact that nearly every diplomat at Copenhagen was a favorite with his sovereign, gave the post unusual prestige, and made “conversations” possible there which could not have taken place elsewhere. Mr. Egan evidently understood the situation and tactfully adjusted himself to it. He was on good terms with Szchenyi, the Austro-Hungarian Minister and rather intimate with Henkel-Donnersmarck, a German statesman somewhat too old-fashioned to please the Kaiser. Than Mr. Egan few of our diplomats seem to have learned more from their colleagues.

The ideas which the keenly observant, shrewdly receptive, and notably far-sighted author of these memoirs seems desirous, amid all the entertaining digressions and incidental pleasantries of his narrative, of impressing upon his compatriots are two: first, the extent, the subtlety and the virulence of German propaganda, and second, the need of America for an intelligent knowledge of those smaller countries in which the American democratic example ought to have been most powerful but in which German influence was in reality least opposed from without.

We are friendly to the smaller countries, and they now have some reason to trust us—but do they really understand us, or we them? In Denmark, Minister Egan was seriously embarrassed in his efforts to negotiate the sale of the Danish West Indies—a sale completed just in the nick of time, before America entered the war—because Danes generally considered Americans so barbarously disposed toward negroes that they could not be trusted to rule them. Actually, Danish humanitarian feeling was up in arms against America. What a pity that certain Southern lynchings should so have misrepresented to Denmark the general attitude of America. How unfortunate that the real nature of the American negro problem could not have been even a little understood in Denmark! Before the war we did not concern ourselves much about such things. The fact that we almost lost the Danish West

Indies because Denmark saw our civilization through the medium of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may serve as an example to warn us against provincial indifference to the opinions of the world; but the whole problem is of course bigger than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and broader than Denmark.

"We have two bad habits," writes Mr. Egan: "We read our psychology as well as our temperament—the result of a unique kind of experience and education—into the minds of other people, and we despise the opinion of nations which are small." Is it not one of the conspicuous lessons of the war that it makes a world of difference whether the little countries regard democracy with hope and affection, or look "with helpless respect" toward autocracy? Truly there has always been too much truth in the gibe of Mr. Dooley: "Up until recently ye thought Bulgaria was only the name of a sleepin' car." Yet Bulgaria counted—and on the wrong side.

In the little countries German vigilance was sleepless, German influence unceasing. In Sweden the upper classes were allowed no intellectual contact with the democracies of the world, the fear of Russia was sedulously kept alive, and the good feeling between Sweden and Denmark was undermined. *Kultur* patronized Danish letters. It was impossible for a Danish author to succeed, on a large scale, unless his works were translated into German and sold in Germany; and hence it was impossible for a Danish author to write against Germany without sacrificing at once his market and his reputation outside of Denmark. In all the Scandinavian countries scholars looked to Germany as the center of learning, and received encouragement from Germany.

And if German intrigue was unsuccessful in Norway, this failure was due neither to counter-influences upon the part of the Allies nor to a lack of diligence upon the part of the friends of Germany. The reason for German unsuccess in Norway should be interesting to Americans. Neither Swede nor Norwegian, it would seem, is designed by nature to be a slave of autocracy, and of the Norwegian in particular it is said that he "can neither be laughed, argued, or coerced out of an opinion that he believes to be founded on a principle"; and that "he looks on all questions from the point of view of a free man thinking his own thoughts."

All this spreading of German influence and prestige Mr. Egan from his central position in Copenhagen could see and understand. No other book is itself less of the nature, or has less the tone, of propaganda than this one of his; yet no other book tells us quite so much about the working of propaganda. Honest propaganda, one sees, of course, is the best. The Germans knew this as well as anybody, and so up to a certain point their methods were honest! Germany did indeed encourage and praise Scandinavian scholars and authors who had merit—not those who lacked it. She was as honest as Iago—

And what's he then that says I play the villain,
When this advice I give is free and honest,
Probal to thinking, and, indeed, the course
To win the Moor again?

Such mock honesty must be counteracted by real honesty. Propa-

ganda—much as Americans have come to loathe the very word—must be used not for intrigue but in the interests of mutual understanding; it must be a propaganda of truth designed to build up that public opinion of the world which is the surest safeguard of peace. And nowhere is the need of mutual understanding more apparent than in the case of America and Scandinavia; for “our position in the world of democracy has been affected in these northern nations by the constant representations upon the part of our enemies that we are a people of usurers and materialists”—and this at a time when the Danes and Norwegians are in love with democracy and the Swedes are turning toward freedom.

Persuasive, plausible, and poisonous, German intrigue did not scruple to use religion as a means to strengthen itself. This was obvious enough in Germany itself; but it is probable that the very blatancy of German utterances about “the good old German God” blinded most of us to the scope of German religious propaganda. Could it be that a nation which appeared to have lapsed into paganism could hope to influence other nations through religion? But it was even so!

The Cahensly plot in America, the plan to keep German Catholic immigrants in America faithful to the Fatherland by placing them under the exclusive influence of German preachers and teachers—a plan bravely and successfully opposed by Archbishop Ireland—showed the possibilities in this direction. The same thing had been tried among the Lutherans and had for a time succeeded. Not only was religion in Germany compelled to justify Kaiserism, but Kaiserism was elsewhere “concealed in the glove of piety.”

But it is scarcely less surprising to learn something of the true religious and political situation within Germany. What elements in Germany, if any, were anti-imperialistic? Not the Socialists certainly—every one understands that now. How about the party of the Center? The matter is rather too complicated and too delicate for brief exposition, but it may be said that at the outbreak of the war the Center was no longer the party of Windthorst, and that something of a surprise awaits those whose ideas about the position of the Center have been derived, let us say, from that work of imposing frankness and text-book gravity, von Buelow's *Imperial Germany*.

Ultra-gravity, by the way, is not the chief characteristic of Mr. Egan's book. This is well, for though there is really no subject so serious as that of international politics, the portentous technicalities and solemn mysteries of world politics are just now somewhat discredited.

In general our books of ambassadorial authorship in America have manifested a saving sense of humor, which is often in America the complement of earnestness. If there is a certain glee in Mr. Egan's accounts of how he escaped relatively unscathed from Dr. Cook, and of how he deprived his friends the journalists of a big sensation in connection with the visit to Copenhagen of Booker T. Washington—to whom Mr. Egan pays, in passing, a high tribute—American readers will be only the more readily impressed with the value of the viewpoint which he sets forth with so much insight and so much knowledge.

JOYCE KILMER. Edited with a Memoir by Robert Cortes Holliday. New York: George H. Doran Company.

In order to understand Joyce Kilmer, one must have him whole. That is why one is so much more grateful for these two volumes of poems, essays, and letters than one usually is for such collections. The poems are original and sincere, certainly; the essays are clever and as natural as sunshine. Yet there is no single essay or poem, perhaps, that would preserve the name of Joyce Kilmer from ultimate oblivion. That Joyce Kilmer should be forgotten, however, would be a calamity; he was a man whose vital influence should not be restricted to a small circle or a short life. Few can read his story and the things that he wrote without a sense of enlarged life and heightened hope.

Here in America we have been mixing bloods, educating, democratizing, exposing young people to all sorts of stimulating influences for a good many generations. And what do we expect to be the result? What, in other words, do we hope, in our hearts, that the state of our children and our children's children, at best, will be? For of course our ideals, so far as they are not meant merely to keep us in the straight and narrow path, mostly have reference to posterity. Perhaps it is not too bold an assertion to say that we more or less consciously look forward to a time when, on the whole, our youthful descendants will be in freedom, in sincerity, in buoyancy, in humanity, and above all in joy of living, much as Joyce Kilmer was. Francis Thompson wrote of the "after-woman"; Joyce Kilmer was the after-youth, come before his time.

This statement, while it sounds sentimental, is in fact perfectly logical. Joyce Kilmer was a natural product of our loose and much criticized, but now at last triumphantly justified American system of education. He was as sturdily independent as one of the men of 1776, as daring as a pioneer, as adaptable as an American woman. He was unconventional; he was not technical; he was not profound, but he was keen and right. He was amazingly versatile, full of quenchless enthusiasm, thoroughly alive. He had the divine gift of humor without unkindness, and a pathetic seriousness without the least taint of old-world melancholy or imported romanticism. He was, as the new American will certainly be, cosmopolitan in sympathies, but at the same time warmly nationalistic. He could be ecstatic as a lark sometimes, but was eminently shrewd and sensible.

Certainly if all this does not represent our ideal of the future American, it represents with fair accuracy what we seem to be doing our best to make him. If we want a type sadder, more prudent, more deeply marked by the precocious sobriety of an early maturity, something graver and more "vocational" in aspect, something a little more old-fogyish, more like a German student, perhaps; more given to accepting ready-made ideas, more profound with a second-hand profundity, more skeptical, more submissive,—then we are not, in this land of the free, with our colleges, with our free association of the sexes, with our throwing open of every door to the young—we are not taking the right way to get it. Our young people have a good deal their own way, and it seems to us who are older, that they undergo a good deal of excitement and store away a good deal of experience before they are

twenty-five. Does this spoil them or make them blasé? Not necessarily.

Joyce Kilmer himself always declared that he was half Irish. No one who has himself a "flash of the Irish" can fail to recognize the truth of this claim. But there were other strains—English and Scotch. And the quality of Kilmer's mind was, after all, quite as much Yankee as Irish. No sooner does one permit oneself to say of some remark of his that it is a perfectly characteristic example of Irish wit than one is struck with the general kinship of the thought with something said, for instance, by Mark Twain. So of his poetry: some of it has an appeal like that of James Whitcomb Riley; but Riley was above all things sentimental and Hoosier, while Kilmer at times more truly connects with the older American tradition. He is often in spirit not unlike Holmes, or Lowell—but with, of course, a difference.

What strikes one in Kilmer's writings, after all, is that here is something not so much modern, after the present fashion of modernity, as actually and refreshingly new—something warmer, truer, better balanced, and more natural than the older literature; something more honest than the old efforts after honesty, freer than the old struggles for freedom. Is it not possible that this better spirit, this less hampered expression, this easier access to sympathy, is waiting for us, or for our children, somewhere not too far in the future?

The feeling of newness, the sense of the future, in Kilmer's work, is due less to its originality than to its harmonious combination of widely different feelings and impressions—a combination not at all suggestive of what is called "modern unrest." Stridency, shock, overdone realism, fine-spun skepticism, over-wrought mood—all the most characteristically modern things, in short, appear to be automatically excluded from his poetry. There is no apparent effort at exclusion; he simply writes as he pleases, and his writing suggests a new order of things, built on the old—suggests a love of children, for instance, that is not especially Hoosier or small-townish, a love of home that is robust enough to find joy in steam heat, electric light, and hardwood floors, as that of our fathers was sufficiently vigorous to survive the discomforts and inconveniences of the old homestead—all this felt with a greater relish than of old, and with a fuller, a more varied sympathy for others.

A poet who writes of love, if he is sincere, produces from within himself things old and things new, all that he has, in fact. If he is discontented or narrow minded or moody or flippant, he is very likely to reveal the fact. Kilmer had an unbounded scorn for those whom he addressed as—

You little poets mincing there
With women's hearts and women's hair.

He himself wrote love poetry in the spirit of Walter Scott—except, of course, that Sir Walter did not know how to write love poetry and did not have the advantage of being brought up among modern American young women. But it is not merely the fineness, the chivalry, of such a poem as "The Blue Valentine" that impresses one; it is the

richness of the offering, the wealth and contentment of the mind that can so think and feel.

What all this betokens is a personality perfectly integrated and therefore, as was always felt by those who knew Kilmer, happy and strong. In him, humor, piety, love, friendship, intellect, meet in a synthesis that one feels to be somehow new. In this personality, there seems to be no unhappy break with the past, no undue discontent with the present, no sense of homelessness, no apparent lesion of any kind. It accepts heartily the conditions that so many have found disturbing—modern life, this modern war of ours, everything—and adjusts itself to them. Not even the work of a hack-writer could embitter it.

What of his standing as a man of letters? It is idle to discuss the question of whether or not he was a genius. As a writer, perhaps not; as an avatar of young America, yes. Only a personality having the strength of genius could be such an orator—an average mind could not compass it. Kilmer's poems say just what they were meant to say, with convincing sincerity and sometimes with singular originality of phrase—the subtlest form of originality of thought. His verses, in all their intensity, are always as friendly and human as a hand-clasp. He will probably not go down to history, however, as a great poet in the sense either of a great word-master, or a great creator of verbal melodies, or as a great seer. What matter?

America will take Joyce Kilmer to her heart, not because he was a genius in any of the narrower senses, but because he was a prophesy.

CAN GRANDE'S CASTLE. By Amy Lowell. New York: the Macmillan Company.

In subtlety of suggestion, splendor of phraseology, and picturesqueness of imagery, surely most writing of the past, whether in verse or prose, must be regarded as drab and tame by comparison with Miss Lowell's polyphonic prose. And it would be mere folly to denounce as simply "precious" writing which has so many facets of simplicity and of art. The element of surprise due to the use of words and phrases in combinations that give them an entirely new luminosity; the rich, vari-colored effect of the whole, with its superposition of picture on picture and mood on mood, tempts one to believe that Miss Lowell has really developed a new and immensely powerful art.

Perhaps she has. Certainly, liberty is a great thing and not to be trammelled whether in verse or in thought. But without disapproving the tendency, one may raise certain queries as to its scope and effect.

The truth about free verse would seem to be—as, indeed, its adherents assert—that its defiance of scansion is nothing new. No one of course reads the line, "The quality of mercy is not strained," as it is scanned. But these lines and other lines of classic English poetry are measured—measured, it is true, according to some rather mysterious psychic law, but indubitably measured: we know whether the full number of feet in the line has been filled out even though we cannot without pain force our utterance to conform to the formal metrical scheme. And so what the free versifiers do is not so much to introduce